



Diocese of the Virgin Islands  
(Episcopal Church / Anglican)

The Episcopal Church of the Virgin Islands, Incorporated

Founded 1947 \* Incorporated 1972

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## **PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**OCTOBER 4, 2020**

**TO THE CLERGY, PEOPLE OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND OUR VIRTUAL VIEWERS AND LISTENERS ON RADIO AND READERS OF THE DAILY NEWS**

***The People said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen.” Moses responded, “Do not be afraid; for God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying.” Exodus 20:19-20.***

This week we continue our pilgrimage during this COVID-19 pandemic. We heard from the Book of Exodus how God gave the Children of Israel a series of imperatives (Commandments) as guidelines to assist them in their development as a community and to prepare them for their worship life when the hardships of the present time were over. Now, there are over six hundred commandments attributed to Moses. The reading from Exodus gave us a summary that we know as the Ten Commandments. If we are able to remember and attempt to keep just this ten, then all the others may be covered as well. You see, as the people journeyed to their promised place, they had guidelines and procedures to direct their behavior and to ensure their safety. To abide by those principles had a great reward. Just imagine how some of those traveling must have felt, to be going through a great ordeal and having a set of imperatives to assist in their safety and to give them hope that the present time will not overwhelm them, and they lived to tell the story of how they overcame!

As we journey through this pandemic, we too were given guidelines to follow that could keep us safe from that unseen enemy; and while we endure the present hardships, we have some hope that we will overcome. To be alive at this time gives us the assurance that this enemy will be defeated because previous attempts of pandemics were defeated by those who obeyed the imperatives given. We have our biblical commands, and additionally, we have those prepared by persons skilled in the science of infectious diseases. What could be so hard to follow? We cannot ignore the sciences because we have never done this before. Others have endured pandemics down through the ages, and today we have the accounts of their survival. So, let us consider this present time as our testing time.

***See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Isaiah 42:9***

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Didn't we learn from Scripture that those who experienced the Exodus and wandered around in the wilderness or barren places were tested all along the way? With each test they faced, they discovered that God was not far away. All they had to do was cry out to God. All their needs were supplied, not their wants now, but their needs. Is that story coming alive for us today? Those who disobey the sciences of our time will end up suffering the consequences. Just as scripture is clear about the fruit of disobedience, so is the present time during this pandemic revealing to us, that if we seek to go against both commands of God and the instructions provided for our health and safety, there will be consequences.

For us today, the word of God is clear about what must be done to inherit eternal life. Throughout scripture God sent messengers to remind the people and to call them back to the way that leads to eternal life. Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death and to disobey can lead us into harm's way. So, who are the wise among us? During this time when our worship spaces may be closed for public worship, during this time when so many of our liberties are restricted, during this time, when we can't enjoy some of the pleasures of life which we so often took for granted, during this time, where do we turn to find comfort and hope? The word of God has inspired many a sufferer who in turn produces resources to comfort and cheer a suffering and or persecuted people. It is in the midst of loss that some of the most beloved poems were penned and eventually became favorites of present-day followers of the Way. The hymn writer William O Cushing puts it this way, and I paraphrase, "Often when earth hath no balm for my healing, in the word of God, "I find comfort" and I add, and there I find hope.

The history of our people and how they endured grave hardships and yet persevered to leave us accounts of how they overcame should kindle a sacred flame in our hearts that would enable us to adjust ourselves to the present time, mindful that this is not the end for us. Life is a pilgrimage with rough and smooth places. There is some place where we can find comfort and hope because to God the rough and the smooth are both alike. Wherever we are on this pilgrimage, God is with us. Each day we can drink from the living fountain and find 'our thirsts quenched, and our souls revived, and in the Light of life we can walk till traveling days are done.'" Those who endure to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13. Amen

Grace and Peace,



The Rt. Rev. E. Ambrose Gumbs, D.D.  
Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands

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